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Copy No. 31CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
14 December 1955

TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: French National Assembly Election of 2 January 1956

1. Offices to be filled: All 626 seats in the National Assembly except 30 seats for Algeria, where local disturbances forced postponement. The term of office is five years. Deputies will be elected in France (544 deputies), and Overseas France (52 deputies). Elections will be held under the electoral law of 1951 which calls for party lists in each district of metropolitan France. The district in metropolitan France corresponds to the department in all cases except for the eight most populous departments, which are divided into two or more districts. In all districts except the eight Paris area ones, parties may affiliate so that their votes can be counted as a unit, and any party slate or affiliated group receiving a majority of the total votes in a district get all the seats for the district. Failing a majority, the seats are divided by a system of proportional representation which tends to favor the affiliated groups. The proportional representation system used in the eight Paris area districts gives no advantage to the large parties there, which in 1951 were the Communists and the Gaullists.

Electoral Timetable

2 December:	National Assembly and Council of the Republic dissolved
5 December:	Registration of parties intending to affiliate
10 December:	Declaration of formal alliances
12 December:	Filing of unallied lists of candidates
13 December:	Opening of official campaign
18 December:	Publication of official lists of candidates
2 January :	Election day
19 January :	Date new assembly will probably convene

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2. Parties or factions participating: Twenty-eight groups, including all parties now represented in the National Assembly, have registered their intention to seek alliances. To ally with other groups a party must present candidates in 30 departments, and many of those registered will not be able to meet this requirement. Additional groups may present local lists which will not seek affiliation.

3. Outstanding personalities: Jacques Duclos, ranking Communist Party leader after Thorez; Guy Mollet, secretary general of the Socialist Party; Pierre Pflimlin and Robert Schuman, leaders of the Popular Republican Party; Edgar Faure, present premier, a Radical Socialist; Pierre Mendes-France, former premier, who controls the Radical Socialist Party machinery; Francois Mitterrand, chairman of the Democratic Resistance Union; Jacques Chaban-Delmas, chairman of the Gaullist Social Republican parliamentary group; Antoine Pinay, foreign minister of the Faure government, former premier, an Independent Republican.

4. Present party strengths:

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats in present assembly</u>	<u>Percent of total valid ballots in 1951 elections</u>
Communists & 4 Progressives	98	26
Socialists	104	14.6
Popular Republicans (MRP)	88	12.3
Overseas Independents	16	
Rally of the Republican Left--Radical Socialists	75	11.5
Democratic Resistance Union (UDSR)	24	
Gaullists--		21.6
Social Republicans	69	
Republican and Social Action (ARS)	32	
Rightist Bloc		13.1
Independent Republicans	55	
Independent Peasants	27	
Peasants	21	
Unaffiliated	15	
	624	
Vacancies	3	
	627*	

* New assembly will have only 626 seats; present deputy from French India will not be replaced.

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5. Principle Issues: The elections are likely to be fought largely on domestic issues (beet-sugar subsidy, church-school question, etc.), with foreign policy, including East-West differences, playing only a minor part. North Africa is considered to be primarily a domestic question. Some deputies believe that the question of European integration will play a considerable role in the campaign and, coupled with the church-school issue, will have a strong influence on electoral alliances. A strong feeling of disillusionment over the shortcomings of the assembly has been accentuated in the public mind by the confusion surrounding the parliamentary debates of the last few weeks.

Mendes-France probably hopes to make a national issue out of the dissolution maneuver which blocked his attempt to stretch the campaign period. Non-Communist leftist groups are making a strong effort to convince the nation that the dissolution decision constitutes something equivalent to a right-wing "coup d'etat." While dissolution was constitutionally proper and may prove to be a popular move, Frenchmen who were brought up in the "Republican" tradition seem to feel the parliamentary dissolution, particularly by surprise and in the present confused circumstances, had dictatorial overtones.

6. Principal factors influencing the outcome:

a. Public attitudes: The total of eligible voters will probably be about 26,000,000, although some press reports make it as high as 30,000,000. In 1951, 24,500,000 were eligible to vote. The heavy registration may indicate--as a report for the Paris area shows--that the public mistakenly believes registration to be compulsory and not that the public is being swayed by the political controversy now raging in Paris political circles. At the time the elections were announced, at any rate, the public still seemed to take a cynical view of the assembly and to believe that elections would not return an assembly markedly different from the present one. A large turnout on 2 January, however, could work in favor of Mendes-France's political supporters and possibly result in a definite shift in the assembly to the left-center.

b. The 1951 electoral law: The 1951 electoral law was originally designed to cut into Communist and Gaullist representation through a provision permitting party alliances. The general impression is that alliances will be less effective in discriminating against the Communists in 1956 as compared with 1951 because of dissension among the center parties. With many of the present center party alliances

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competing against each other as well as against the Communists, proportional representation will determine the allocation of seats in most of the districts. The elections are therefore likely to increase the number of deputies, because the party's share of the popular vote will probably be only slightly less than its 1951 percentage.

c. Party splits: The tug of war between Mendes-France and Faure will split the Radical Socialist vote. Similar divisive forces are at work in practically all of the parties. Dissenters have been expelled from the Communist Party, and one of them, Auguste Lecoœur, is attempting to form a new grouping which he hopes will claim a number of unattached deputies. The Popular Republicans, though they backed Faure against Mendes-France in the recent votes of confidence, have a number of back-benchers who are strongly inclined to favor Mendes-France. René Plevin has expected the UDSR to remain together through the elections, but a split is also likely there. Local elections in 1953 and 1955 indicate that the already split Gaullists will further decline to the profit of the right-center parties.

d. Party alliances: A total of 111 alliances among well-established political groups, plus 48 alliances within the Poujadist anti-taxation movement, were concluded by the 10 December deadline, as compared with 90 in 1951. The Communists have concluded no alliances, while the Socialists have entered into 47. The Socialist National Council on 6 December rejected a Communist bid for an alliance and in another resolution gave tacit approval to alliances with candidates backed by Mendes-France. Over a third of the 3,500 council delegates, however, favored alliances including the Communists.

Mendes-France stated at a new conference on 7 December that there was no possibility of his own Radical Socialist supporters reaching any agreement with the Communists, and said that France faced the choice of voting for a "Republican Front" or for the outgoing supporters of "immobilism." He held that the Socialists, the Radical Socialists, the ex-Gaullists, and the left-of-center splinter groups could agree to form a new governmental majority after elections.

One major change is the lack of Socialist-Popular Republican alliances as compared with 55 such cases in 1951. As expected, many alliances have been concluded among the rightist bloc, Popular Republicans, and the Faure Radical Socialists. In addition, a majority of the Social Republican alliances are with the rightist bloc and not with the "Republican Front," despite the efforts of the pro-Mendes-France minority.

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Thus, there appears to be a three-cornered political rivalry under way, with the Communists isolated, Mendes-France heading a left-center grouping, and the classical right under Pinay's leadership already organized within itself and allied with the Popular Republican, Radical Socialist and Social Republican Parties.

These groupings, however, are far from settled. Mendes-France is probably closer ideologically to Pinay than to the Socialists; both men are attempting to push their respective supporters into accepting reforms of the French economy looking toward a more dynamic free enterprise system. The present bitter division is the result of an accumulation of aggressions and errors by both sides.

7. Background: The 1 December decision of the Faure government to dissolve the National Assembly necessitated advancing the date of national elections to 2 January 1956. Without this decision elections could have been held as late as June.

During November the assembly and Council of the Republic had voted several times in support of bills proposing early elections, but had failed to agree upon an election law. On 29 November, the Faure government was defeated by a constitutional majority on an issue of confidence arising out of the election issue. The Mendes-France government fell on 5 February, and the Faure cabinet thus became the second government to be defeated within an 18-month period by a constitutional majority. The constitution provides that in such a case the dissolution of the assembly may be decided by the cabinet.

The dissolution issue split Faure's cabinet. Five Radical Socialist ministers tried to resign in protest. The constitution prohibits changes in the government, however, after the assembly has been dissolved.

Faure had taken a strong stand during the debates in favor of early elections. Pinay seems to have induced him to press for elections as soon as possible, regardless of whether electoral reform was obtained. Pinay's preference for early elections and the 1951 electoral law is probably based not so much on the estimate that these moves favor his political allies but that they constitute serious disadvantages for Mendes-France. Mendes-France wanted later elections in order to gain time to build his political organization. He much preferred a system of single-deputy election districts.

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The Communist Party played an ambiguous role in this parliamentary struggle. Communist strength had been on a steady decline from its high point of 1947, when the party was dropped from the government. The Communist deputies have recently, however, been trying to regain a more active role in the assembly, and many non-Communist deputies have become less disposed to reject their co-operation on specific issues. The Communists supported the Faure government in the recent confidence votes on the election issue, even providing such crucial support that for the first time since 1947 a government stayed in power by virtue of their backing on a formal confidence vote.

8. Informed opinion on outcome: While there appears to be wide agreement that the political balance in the new assembly will not differ radically from the present line-up, there is much less unanimity of opinion as to the effect of the 1951 electoral law on the relative strengths of the various parties. The Communists are expected to poll a slightly smaller proportion of the vote than in 1951, but, because of the disputes among the center parties, to win more seats than they did in the last elections. It is believed that early elections favor the right-center parties supporting Faure and work to the disadvantage of Mendes-France, who needed more time to campaign for his left-center support. The Gaullists are expected to lose a considerable number of seats to the right-center groups.

9. Significance for US security interests: The dissension among the non-Communist parties may lead to greater difficulties in maintaining a stable governing majority in the new assembly and give increased importance to the larger bloc of Communist deputies expected in the assembly.

Regardless of the outcome, there will be continuing willingness to see evidence of a detente with the Soviet bloc and strong pressure for reduced military expenditures.

There is little likelihood of Communist participation in any government formed in the assembly resulting from this election.

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